

Ontario Department of Agriculture

Birds of Ontario in Relation to Agriculture

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When white men first began to settle this Province, it was a vast forest, broken only by its rivers, lakes, and marshes. Its birds consisted of such species as were adapted for life among trees, or were waterfowl. As the country became cleared and population increased, some of these birds were driven from their ancient haunts and are now only found in the wooded country of the north, while the Wild Turkey and Passenger Pigeon have become extinct.

The changes brought about by settlement and cultivation, however, have produced conditions better adapted to the requirements of certain other forms of bird life, and so we now find in our orchards, fields and gardens a variety of feathered friends whose range was formerly restricted to natural meadows or thickets bordering rivers and marsh land. The range of many of these birds is being extended northward as cultivation progresses in that direction, so that it is now a common thing to hear of the appearance of Meadowlarks, Orioles, Bobolinks, and Bluebirds in the new settlements of Northern Ontario where they were previously unknown. Many of our birds have also changed their habits so as to better adapt themselves to modern conditions. Thus we find that all the Swallows, except the Bank Swallow, have abandoned their former nesting places in caves or hollowed trees and now occupy our buildings. The Chimney Swift and Phoebe do the same thing, while Bluebirds and House Wrens will readily take possession of any box placed for them in the garden or orchard, if out of the reach of their deadly enemy the house cat. Robins and Chipping Sparrows apparently find the presence of human beings beneficial to them, for they build their nests with no pretence at concealment in the most frequented places, and the Flicker often finds a safe nesting place in an old tree trunk or even a telegraph pole in a city. "Of all wild creatures, birds will most readily adapt themselves to conditions created by human agency. If not persecuted they will attach themselves to the farm, garden, and orchard, where their services are of the greatest value.

In all about thirteen thousand species of birds are known to science: of this number only three hundred and twenty-five have been found in Ontario. Many of these are very rare and not likely to be noticed by ordinary observers, others are merely accidental visitors which may never be seen again.

Birds may be studied from three points of view: The scientific, the sentimental, and the economic. The first includes their origin, development, structure, and